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**OSCE
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Working Session 17

Political Rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

Mr./Ms Moderator,
Thank you very much for the floor.

My name is Pervin Chairoula, and I am representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece.

Full and effective political participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. According to many international documents persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in the decision - making process on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation. However, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is inadequately represented in society's policy and decision making system.

The new law on election adopted in 1991, does not allow the minority to elect an independent MP. This new law introduced 3% electoral threshold that is implemented for both political parties and independent candidates. In short, an independent MP candidate needs to collect more than 300.000 votes. (The minority until the new regulations had elected independent MPs twice in Rodopi and once in Xanthi). Due to this new electoral regulation the minority was forced to indicate MP candidates through the majority political parties. Although there are two minority MP's in the Greek Parliament today, their influence on the decision making structures is insignificant. So the 3% electoral threshold is assumed as an obstacle for the minority to elect their independent members for the Greek Parliament.

Furthermore, in 1994, a new bill on local administration was adopted, which reduced the number of prefectures and sub districts from 6.000 to 1034 by combining many sub districts and establishing new prefectures. With this new bill, known as «Kapodistrias I», the number of prefectures and sub districts, where the majority of the population is inhabited by the Turkish Minority, and the number of the elected representatives of the minority decreased. With this new bill (2240/94), the State created two enlarged electoral districts in the region of Thrace, one for the prefectures of Xanthi-Kavala-Drama, and the other for Rodopi-Evros regions. As a result, the electoral constituencies populated heavily by the minority are merged with the ones populated by the majority so as to avoid the possibility of an election of Turkish governor. In order to cover the discriminatory nature of this implication, the system of enlarged electoral district is also imposed in the prefecture of Athens-Piraeus.

Since 1994, the Secretary Generals of regions started to be appointed by the government as the highest state official in the region. Municipalities and Prefecture Assemblies' decisions have to be approved by the Secretary General who also has the right to veto. The power of the Secretary General has always been criticized of not being in line with the spirit of democracy and democratic governance. The appointed Secretary General is usually a member of the political party in power. In many cases the approval of such development projects of prefectures of the region are taken according to political view of the prefecture council. Prefectures decisions (which are governed by Turks) taken by the local council do not always have the same chance of taking approval as the majority prefectures.

The Secretary General of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace has the statutory responsibility for the supervision of rights provided to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs retains an important advisory role for implementation of the state's minority policy via Political Affairs Bureau in Xanthi.

Recommendations

We call upon the Greek State:

- To take all necessary steps in line with the international standards in order to ensure the effective participation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to the political life in Greece.
- To withdraw the 3% electoral threshold for an independent candidate to be elected and abolish the division of local districts into enlarged electoral districts which are now implemented in the prefectures of Rhodopi and Xanthi.

Pervin Chairoula

Member
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